International Voices is an award winning annual publication of the writing and artwork of Westchester Community College students. As always, represented here are just some of the many diverse perspectives of the Westchester Community College community.

What an interesting and challenging year it has been since I wrote this welcome letter last year. At that time, I wrote mostly about the changes going on at the College. Of course, we are still experiencing the challenges of those changes here at the College, but now we are also facing unprecedented challenges in our transition to a new federal administration. After an election process that polarized the country like never before, the results of that election and leadership transition have so far had the effect of pouring gasoline on a fire.

No matter what side of the political spectrum one falls under, issues of immigration, the economy, healthcare, and the future direction of the country are on everyone’s mind. In this climate, it is more important than ever to hear the voices of those whose perspectives might be different from our own. This openness and dialogue are what make a society flourish and progress.

International Voices is a forum for those voices. In the voices of our students, we can witness a beautiful diversity of thought and expression that showcases the best qualities of humanity and highlights the enduring truth that our strength as a society, as a community, as a country, and as a species lies in that diversity.

In fact, it is this idea of strength in difference that draws me and many of my colleagues to the mission of our College. The impact we have on our students’ lives not only enhances their life and career goals, but also benefits society and the world when they leave here and contribute their unique ideas and talents to their communities.

And so, with great pride in the talented students of Westchester Community College, I offer you International Voices 2017. Enjoy!

Sincerely,

Kent Trickel

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Kent Trickel
STELLA LEMEL

international voices 2017
an annual publication
of the writing and artwork
of international students

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special thanks
to all of the students who
submitted their work to this year’s
issue, to faculty, counselors, staff,
and administrators who encouraged
students to submit their writing and
artwork & supported this journal by
posting and announcing the call for
submissions, to those who have
provided a wide audience for our
artists and writers by distributing past
issues of International Voices in their
classes, the library, the Academic
Support Center, and various offices &
buildings on and off campus

printing
Mount Kisco Press
Pleasantville, New York

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Paulo Reis
Brazilian. Wants to become an animator and open his own animation studio.

Andrea Abagnale
United States. English. Humanities major. Plans to retire from WCC and pursue photography or Real Estate.

Tyrell Bennett

Lingzhi Dang
China. Chinese. Performing Arts major. Wants to learn English well and hopes to make a living on music.

Rushda Nuamdeen

Emi Osaki

Isabelle Piwnicki

Heloise Paugam
France. French. Visual Arts major. Plans to become a graphic designer and a freelance photographer.

Stella Lemale
Israel. English. Nursing major. Plans to become a nurse in a hospital, while continuing to be a mental health advocate.

Elizabeth J. Hernandez
United States. English. Visual Arts major. Wants to explore thoughts and to experiment with different concepts through an illustrative and/or narrative way.

Jessica Bonner
Republic of Panama. Spanish. Social Science major. Plans to pursue a degree in Criminal Justice and also become a successful writer who can inspire others through her experiences.

Geraldo A. Vasquez
Peru. Spanish. Visual Arts major. Plans to transfer to Purchase College for a B.A. in Photography and continue his projects in the photography world that require leadership and strong knowledge in business.

Julianne Demartino
United States. Spanish. Social science major. Plans to become a Nurse Practitioner, volunteer abroad, travel the world, and raise a loving family.

Andrea Abagnale
United States. English. Liberal Arts - Math/Science major. Plans to attend NYU’s McGhee Division to obtain a B.S. in “Organizational and Behavioral Change” for Corporations and Organizations and ultimately attend law school.

Leandra Furchi
United States - Brazil. Portuguese. Spanish. Social science major. Plans to become a Nurse Practitioner, volunteer abroad, travel the world, and raise a loving family.

Jhane Riter
United States. English. Social science major. Wants to pursue a degree in behavioral science.

Angie Rodriguez
Dominican Republic. Education major. Feels God has blessed her with a passion for helping others. Wants to help educate future generations for a better tomorrow.

Yasmer Cabreja
Dominican Republic. Spanish. Communication and Media Arts major.

Luis Rosales

Versella Morgan
United Kingdom. English. Liberal Arts - Social Science major. Plans to further her education and continue writing in her journal and one day publish her writing.

Sundus Tariq
Pakistan. Urdu. Accounting major. Plans to work as a professional accountant and CPM.

Kessy Deoliveira
Brazil. Portuguese. Liberal Arts - Math/Science major.

Contributors
Blowing winds and falling snow
Where rain falls, shelter is found
Heat penetrates, but shade endures
Migration is imminent
The spear of death is hunting
The tribe will live tomorrow
Respect the gift the spear provides
Evolve from nature
Nourish for survival
Use innovation for masterful change
Take my hand as we walk with the others
Our needs are their needs
A child who cries is not alone
Look closer at the wall, it tells a story
Men were here
They are like us
Language divergent, but the message is the same

Seeds of change along green pastures
Wind is the growth as colonization begins
Conquer
Create order
Blind to inhabitants
This is home now, but they are going
Fighting has a future
Surely it will come
A great fire unfolds, upon the night sky
United they march, protecting what is theirs
Minds, ideas, soul’s intangible
That which cannot be taken
Protect what is yours

Humanity defined
Mutable Humans
Flawed
Adaptable
Progressive
What has evolved cannot be contained
You said that you loved me
but that wasn’t true
our engagement ended
when your text came through
I cried for days
felt so incomplete
hoped to awaken
from a bad night’s sleep
as the days turned to months
and the months turned to years
the man I love somehow appeared
he’s far from perfect
but he’s definitely sweet
we see eye to eye
and he’s all that I need
I love me some him
and he love him some me
each day that goes by
our hearts skip a beat
I wish you the best
no need to drag on
I am at peace
and clearly moved on.

JESSICA BONNER
She is the loveliest girl to her parents
she is the wickedest girl to her brothers
she is the notorious girl to her teachers
Always loved and cared by her friends
and makes others happy even when she is down
she is not in love, but being loved by everyone
and that she is
me...

F. RUSHDA NIJAMDEEN
In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue to An island he named, Hispaniola; this is true. Since then, Santo Domingo, where I am from, Has had to overcome Colonization, revolutions, poverty and natural disasters Yet, survives through the hopes and dreams of its people. Many hurricanes and earthquakes have shaken my island Our neighboring country, Haiti, continues to face catastrophes Each year we lose more and more of our forests, and pollution rises Our government has been corrupt and deplorable Poverty plagues us. Yet we survive through the hopes and dreams of our people. Even though the island faces adversity each day that can seem higher than Pico Duarte Our love for culture, family and food flows like the river Yaque. We live our lives through our music and dance. Our tropical nights full of stars in the sky. Our hopes and dreams for a better day never leaving our mind. Santo Domingo is famous for its baseball stars, Big Papi, Pujols, Pedro Martinez, Robinson Cano. Children dream of becoming the next one to succeed, to rise up from the poverty that they have only known. And to one day be able to say, “Baseball has been very good to me.” Their hopes and dreams supported by an entire nation.

**Who am I?**

**JHANE RITER**

Who am I? Located Central Eastern Africa We call our capital Kigali Covered by four North, Uganda East, Tanzania South, Burundi West, Republic of Congo Physically defined by Mountain range Virunga Lake Kivu And volcano Karisimbi Many cities Ten to be exact Many people One point two million to be exact Known for the mass genocide 1994 genocide of the Tutsi people Killed by the hands of the Hutu people Rwanda

**ANGIE RODRIGUEZ**

**EMI OSAKI**

Beautiful Brasil 5th largest in the world to exist In contrast to its 10 midget neighbors in South America; the GIANT Whose river, the Amazon, is largest by its water flow & Rain Forest, the biggest to ever exist on the face of planet earth One can encounter, depending on just where you are, a variety of climates Whose constant floods and land slides swipe away its beautiful people The whites, the blacks, the mulattos People of European and African decent People with history The people who first came to this beautiful country The people who made it as diverse as it is today Consisting of over 200 million lives Traditionally holding such festive and rich culture From their Samba music to their famous Carnivals Celebrated all over the country including some of its largest cities Rio de Janeiro Salvador Belém Recife Brasil, a country loved by its people How can such a country of beauty, greatness, and great spirits with great stature Now start to tarnish its reputation due to being a merchant of weapons involved in foreign conflicts around the world Grow shame! in today’s actions for you have done great, thus far don’t allow this to be your down fall Beautiful Brasil

**LEANDRA FURCHI**
INT. CHURCH DAY

JASMIN faces the aisle wearing a gorgeous white dress with designer white shoes that make her legs look long and shapely. Her hair is cut sort in layers, Jasmin is about 5’3, has a caramel complexion. She begins to walk down the aisle where she will meet with her soon to be husband CHAD who stand at 6’3, Athletic build. Chad has a smooth dark skinned complexion. He smiles at Jasmin with pearly white teeth. Chad is wearing a black suit tailored to fit his physique with black shoes to match.

FATHER JACOB: Dearly Beloved, we are gathered here today in the presence of these witnesses...

Chad faces Jasmin and holds her hand. The couple smiles at each other while the Priest continue speaking.

FATHER JACOB: If any person can show why they may not be joined together - let them speak now or forever hold their peace.

Father Jacob looks around.

FATHER JACOB: Chad, do you take Jasmin to be your Wife? Do you promise to love, honor, cherish and protect her, forsaking all others and holding only unto her?

CHAD: (smiling) I do.

FATHER JACOB Jasmin...

JASMIN: (crying) I do!

FATHER JACOB: ... by the authority vested in me by the state of New York I now declare you to be Husband and Wife. Congratulations, you may kiss your bride.

Families and friends are cheering as the couple passionately kiss one another. The couple now holding hands walking towards the back of the church waiving to everyone as they exit.

INT. TRUMP HOTEL - BATHROOM. NIGHT

Chad and Jasmin are in the jacuzzi eating strawberries and sipping their glass of Sherry white wine.

JASMIN: I feel like our honeymoon just flew by. I mean, I’m not ready to leave this resort. Six days just wasn’t enough. We didn’t really get to do anything!

CHAD: What! We went water sliding, aerobics and spin classes, pool volley ball, beach volley ball...

JASMIN: I mean we didn’t do anything really romantic like the all inclusive boat ride our package offered.

CHAD: Baby, we did all the things you wanted to do remember? And to my knowledge all the romantic activities were performed right here in this all inclusive suite!

JASMIN: (laughing) You know what I mean Chad? Chad’s cell phone begins to ring. Chad ignores it. His cell phone stops ringing after the 7th ring. Then the phone starts to ring again. Chad gets out the jacuzzi, head to his phone. He sees that KARIM is calling so he picks up.

INT. BEDROOM. NIGHT

CHAD: What’s up Reem how are you!

KARIM: Not so good. Man, I’ve been calling you! I’m being detained at JFK. Listen they will release me but...

CHAD: Wait, what?! Why?

KARIM: They wanted to investigate me even after I explained I was born in Lincoln Hospital. Like Helloooo, I’m a citizen! Born and raised in the boogie down Bronx, you heard!?

CHAD: So, I just don’t understand why you are being detained?

KARIM: They have me sitting here because of my name Karim Abdulai. My father is Muslim. I am being released but my wife isn’t, they will send her back to Africa; to Ghana even though she has a green card! Where is the justice! Listen, I need you to...

The phone lost reception. Call is lost.

JASMIN: (offscreen)(using words in a melody) Babyyyyy, I’m getting lonelyyyyy! And a bit tipsyyy!!!

CHAD: What? We went water sliding, aerobics and spin classes, pool volley ball, beach volley ball...

JASMIN: I mean we didn’t do anything really romantic like the all inclusive boat ride our package offered.

CHAD: Baby, we did all the things you wanted to do remember? And to my knowledge all the romantic activities were performed right here in this all inclusive suite!

JASMIN: (laughing) You know what I mean Chad? Chad’s cell phone begins to ring. Chad ignores it. His cell phone stops ringing after the 7th ring. Then the phone starts to ring again. Chad gets out the jacuzzi, head to his phone. He sees that KARIM is calling so he picks up.

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Chad sits on the bed. Looks into the drawer. Takes out his wife’s blue covered passport reading the words United States of America written on it. As he gets up from the bed, he puts the bag on the floor and sits on the chair next to the table. Then reaches for his own, staring at the blank letters.

Reem was explaining this situation to me. and I was hoping we would be ok entering; The phone was cut off as the officer started yelling at me? Why wouldn’t you tell me this last night? Why would you keep this from me? I asked to sit down and wait to speak to an officer from the Department of Immigration. Why are we in this? I know I threw away the rest of the smoke back at the hotel room.

Chad and Jasmin enter an isolated room where they are both asked to sit down and wait to speak to an officer from the Department of Immigration.

Jasmin, don’t panic. Don’t worry anything is alright. Why are we in this? I know I threw away the rest of the smoke back at the hotel room.

They are both asked to sit down and wait to speak to an officer from the Department of Immigration. Why are we in this? I know I threw away the rest of the smoke back at the hotel room.

Jasmin, please allow her to finish. Tell me you are fucking joking.

Mrs. Shah: Ms. Ortiz is the name on your passport. I will be back within an hour with final arrangements. I will come back to pick you up.

Jasmin, you have the option to leave with him, as you are his wife or stay in the United States. It is up to you. I will come back with further information. In the meantime please consider one of these choices. I will be back within an hour with final arrangements. Chad reaches out to grab the officer’s arm.

Chad: Mr. Shah, your name. It is a foreign name right? You are also not from here right?

Mrs. Shah: (stern face) My married name... He’s a citizen Mr. Azar.

Chad: What did this happen to you? What if the tables turned and the president decided to shake up your world, how would you react; ma’am?

Mrs. Shah looks at Jasmin who is crying uncontrollably. Looks back at Chad as she pulls her arm away. Then exit the room.

The immigration officer walks into the cold uncomfortable room where Chad and Jasmin are being detained. Smiles, and sits down in the third chair at the head of the table.

Mrs. Shah: He is my name. Mrs. Lawrence Shah. I was appointed to this case. As you know, the new immigration reforms.

Jasmin: (angrily interrupts) No! We don’t know about any reforms!

Mrs. Shah: Thank you. January 27, our president signed an executive order banning people from seven Muslim majority countries. These countries are...

Jasmin: (shakes his head) You are a citizen of the country Iran. This is the reason why you are being detained. He’s an officer of the law to enforce the law and protect our country’s security. We will send you back within a week to Iran.

Chad: I believe in our love. They cannot separate that. I want you to come with me. We have money saved up. Once we arrive I will contact my friend Zahid. He has family out there. We can stay there until we figure out our next move! We will contact My friend Zahid. He has family out there. We can stay there until we figure out our next move!

Mrs. Shah: You have the option to leave with him, as you are his wife or stay in the United States. It is up to you. I will come back with further information. In the meantime please consider one of these choices. I will be back within an hour with final arrangements. Chad reaches out to grab the officers arm.

Chad: Ma’am, Mrs. Shah, your name. It is a foreign name right? You are also not from here right?

Mrs. Shah: (stern face) My married name... He’s a citizen Mr. Azar.

Chad: What did this happen to you? What if the tables turned and the president decided to shake up your world, how would you react; ma’am?

Mrs. Shah looks at Jasmin who is crying uncontrollably. Looks back at Chad as she pulls her arm away. Then exit the room.

Jasmin calms down. She is then put into a van with other passengers. Jasmin is being taken home. While she is in the van she has flashbacks of her recent conversation she had with Chad.

Jasmin speaks into the phone, is then put into a van with other passengers. Jasmin is being taken home. While she is in the van she has flashbacks of her recent conversation she had with Chad.

Jasmin: (crying)

CHAD: We will keep in contact through What’s app. I am not leaving you. I will talk to my lawyer about Chad’s situation. Then get us out of here.

INT. HALLWAY SEPARATION. NIGHT

The couple is separated. Jasmin screams at him.

JASMIN: (crying)

CHAD: Control yourself dammit!

Jasmin: (frantically speaking in a low tone) So why are we in this? I know I threw away the rest of the smoke back at the hotel room.

Jasmin: (solve screen) Jasmin, remember what we talked about! I trust you! We will do this together.

INT. VAN. NIGHT

Jasmin calms down. She then is put into a van with other passengers. Jasmin is being taken home. While she is in the van she has flashbacks of her recent conversation she had with Chad.

INT. AIRPORT HOLDING ROOM - FLASHBACK

CHAD: Do you believe in our love?

JASMIN: (sobbing) Yes

CHAD: I believe in our love. They cannot separate that. I want you to come with me. We have money saved up. Once we arrive I will contact my friend Zahid. He has family out there. We can stay there until we figure out our next move!

Jasmin looks at Chad. Then bows her head down. Jasmin lays her hand over her face.

Jasmin: (sobbing) Yes

CHAD: I believe in our love. They cannot separate that. I want you to come with me. We have money saved up. Once we arrive I will contact my friend Zahid. He has family out there. We can stay there until we figure out our next move!

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Chad: What did this happen to you? What if the tables turned and the president decided to shake up your world, how would you react; ma’am?

Mrs. Shah looks at Jasmin who is crying uncontrollably. Looks back at Chad as she pulls her arm away. Then exit the room.

Jasmin lays her hand over her face.

Jasmin: (sobbing) Yes

CHAD: I believe in our love. They cannot separate that. I want you to come with me. We have money saved up. Once we arrive I will contact my friend Zahid. He has family out there. We can stay there until we figure out our next move!

Jasmin looks at Chad. Then bows her head down. Jasmin lays her hand over her face.

Jasmin: (sobbing) Yes

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The couple is separated. Jasmin screams at him.

JASMIN: (crying)

CHAD: We will keep in contact through What’s app. I am not leaving you. I will talk to my lawyer about Chad’s situation. Then get us out of here.

INT. BATHROOM SHOWER DAY

Takes her shower.

INT. BEDROOM DAY

Crawls clothes on to prepare herself to join the pro-
testers downtown in front of Trump International Hotel & Tower New York.

EXT. TRUMP INTERNATIONAL HOTEL & TOWER NEW YORK. DAY

Jasmin is coming up from the subway stairs. She can hear people yelling out words that are not quite clear. As she continues to walk towards the massive crowd ahead of her she sees a news reporter.

NEWS REPORTER: More than 300,000 people are here marching through Manhattan today in solidarity with the Women’s March in Washington, according to the Mayor’s Office. Male and female, young and old fills midtown Manhattan marching from the United Nations head quarters along 42nd street and up fifth Avenue to Trump Tower where...

Jasmin continues walking along side an Indian Woman. The woman smiles at Jasmin. Then offers her hand to Jasmin. Jasmin accepts the offer by grabbing her hand and they both continue to march together. The two women are now lost in the crowd.

The End.
It might be the time that this girl started to live with this phobia when she was five years old or it might be before that time. She dealt with phobia when she met new people, walking in her house during the night time, and also walking from one room to another. She feared talking. She never talked freely because she feared making mistakes. This girl grew up. Her philosophy in life was formed by fear. When she entered school she feared making friends, talking in class or talking to her teacher. She used to have bad dreams and fear was part of her life. She used to go out shopping with her mother, grabbing her clothes as a poor man grabbing a hundred dollar bill in his hand tightly to not lose it. She never had close friends, because she feared choosing bad ones. She spent most of her life feeling lonely. She never took the first step. She usually waited for others to take that step for her. She never made a decision because she was scared of being incorrect. Her self-confidence started to decrease. When that girl turned sixteen, she started to think about getting a driver’s license. It took her five years to learn how to drive with less fear, and she drove only locally. She never drove on highways.

Her story with phobia started when that girl crossed a street next to her house in Jordan. There, children are allowed to go out to the streets by themselves to play. Moreover, the children used to walk to the closest markets to buy some candy and snacks. In Jordan, you can find at least one candy shop on each street. So it is easy for any child to get some change from parents and go out on the streets alone to buy candy or snacks. That habit is still common among people who live in Jordan today. It is fun for children, but it is also risky.

One day, my ten year old brother and seven year old sister were deciding to go and get some candy from one of the closest candy shops to our house. They both went out without asking me if I wanted to join them. I was five years old at that time when I decided to follow my brother and my sister to cross the street. The street was in front of my family’s house. So it seemed to me as a child an easy way to follow my brother and sister to the candy shop. I looked at both sides of the street to make sure there weren’t any cars. The street was empty, but there was a car that stopped next to the sidewalk. The car had two men who were talking to each other. I waited around five seconds to make sure the car was completely stopped and it wouldn’t move. Then I decided to cross the street. The car and I moved at the same time together. I crossed the street and suddenly the car moved fast coming very close and hit me.

I can’t remember anything after that. However, when I woke up I found myself inside the car (the one that hit me). The two men, who were inside the car, were trying to wake me up, and then they asked me if I felt any pain and where. They both were kind to me. They both were caring. The car driver and his friend carried me to the closest hospital that was next to my house. They talked to me using warm words until we reached the hospital. After that, I slept. I have no idea who carried me inside the hospital or what happened at that time. When I woke up, I found myself in a hospital bed. Both of my legs were hanging. Almost my whole body was covered with plaster. I heard the doctor say that we couldn’t guarantee this girl would walk again. The accident was strong. Both of my legs and pelvis were broken. I spent four months in the hospital.

The first month was the hardest. I can still hear my voice at night. I screamed very loudly day and night. The pain at night was worse than the daytime. The best time for me was when I slept. I hoped to stay asleep. I didn’t want to wake up. I hated when the nurse woke me up while they checked the plaster and the medical machines around me. The second month the pain was less. I woke up mostly during the day. I recognized that I was known in the hospital. Almost everyone in the hospital knew me from my loud painful voice. The doctors and patients used to visit me once in a while and ask me “how is the girl, who kept screaming at night asking for help, doing?” It was funny how the doctors and patients memorized my words at night because they said I kept saying the same words every night. They told me I said, “Where is my Mom, where is my Dad. I need help. Help, help.”

The rest of the time that I spent in that hospital was better. Many people visited me including family, doctors, nurses and patients. The pain was almost gone during the last month that I spent in the hospital. The last month was a fun month for me. I used to sing for doctors and patients. Everyone there liked me. They thought I was a charismatic kid. They might also have felt happy for me because I started to look and feel better. Finally, the doctors told my parents that I might walk again. I entered the hospital with unbelievable pain, and I got out with a smile. I smiled for the good time that I spent with the doctors and patients. Everyone there liked me. They thought I was a charismatic kid. They might also have felt happy for me because I started to look and feel better. Finally, the doctors told my parents that I might walk again. I entered the hospital with unbelievable pain, and I got out with a smile. I smiled for the good time that I spent with the doctors and patients.
Self-Advocacy

Self-advocating means standing up for yourself, your friends and your family. Never do anything mean or hurtful to anyone. Treat others how they like to be treated. NEVER EVER act like a big fat bully (b.f.b = big fat bully). Never act shy around people, especially new people we don’t know. Use a big strong voice; never keep your head low. Always have the following: head held high, smiling, full face showing, shoulders relaxed, back straight, and standing strong. Never have the following: chin tucked, head bent down, face partly hidden, shoulders hidden, arms covering body, feet turned in. Always be yourself.
As every spec of life passes by
Those around you lay down and cry
As I see you suffer in pain
My heart compresses leaving me insane
I remember those days of joy
When we lived together in this heaven’s coy
I remember those memories of happiness
When you wiped my tears when I was overcome by sadness
Why does this life have to go?
Why can’t you watch me as I grow?
Why can’t I be in pain?
As you wash away your ties with this mundane
Oh beautiful ol’ Greece
Just sitting reminiscing the time I visited her in Europe
wet winters; hot, dry summers, oh good times
what can I say

Indeed, she is beautiful
The prettiest of her four neighbors Albania, Turkey, Macedonia and Bulgaria
With the most appealing assets which include her 2 tallest mountains: Mount Olympus
and Oros Smolikas

Indeed, she is rich
Plenty and plenty of natural resources she has which include lignite, petroleum, iron ore, bauxite,
lead, zinc, nickel, magnesite, marble, salt, hydropower potential
We can’t forget about the hundreds and hundreds of islands she possesses
And all the beauty and wonder that she stores in Athens, Thebes, Corinth and other cities

Indeed, she caring
We wonder how she manages to fits 10,773,253 people in her heart
Opening her arms for the refugees that are coming from Syria

Indeed, she strong
Despite what she’s been through like the Earthquakes, Extreme temp, Floods
Storms, Wildfire, she still stands tall

Oh beautiful ol’ Greece
What is happening; are your people suffering? With all your beauty, I couldn’t notice
Depression, bad health, poverty; what a bad time your people are going through
What can I say..
The smallest things can change a life. Six words through the small span of thirty seconds changed mine. The morning of April 25th in the year 2007 I woke up a normal ten year old boy, but within five minutes of waking I was wriggling in bed to get up. Not by sticks and stones. But by words that were never supposed to hurt me. Six words that weren’t hard or offensive enough to faze my ten year old mind and burned deep, cleaving themselves to me forever. Those words showed me the limits of life and left me looking for answers for years after. Answers to questions that I didn’t even know I was looking for answers to questions that didn’t exist. For the next whole week after I heard those words I cried uncontrollably. But ultimately the day that those six words attached themselves to me was the day that broke me. The day that I lost the ability to cry.

I woke up to my mother pulling the covers off of me. “Rise and shine!” She would yell every morning. Elated. Maybe because it was spring and starting to warm up, or maybe because she had a family that she loved, or maybe because she was making six figures. It was 7 a.m. I knew it was because I had to be at school at 8:30. I always ended up arriving a few minutes late because I was never the biggest fan of school; therefore I took my time getting ready to go. After my mother woke me up, she would go lay back down or whatever it was that a child did after they woke their kid up to school. Which was basically a child prison. We were taken to this place out of our will and forced to be there for eight hours a day. Basically locked down inside of a classroom, until we were given our time to eat and play for thirty minutes.

I got out of bed cold, because I always got out of bed cold when it isn’t ninety degrees outside. I walked over to the bathroom still more than half asleep and when I got there, I laid down on the bathroom floor mat and went back to sleep. (It actually did that every single day. I was a strange child) The bathroom wasn’t very comfortable, the floors were always cold and the shower used to scare me. It scared me because I never really saw it. I used to walk the bath was right next to the shower, and when I looked at the shower the dark shower curtain would look back at me and unbreakably. At the time, I had no idea what was behind the curtain, so going into it was like being in the dark for me. Leaving me at wits as how I slept in there every morning. Still I slept there and woke in five minutes, brushed my teeth using too much toothpaste, then washed my face using too much soap on the washcloth often burning my eyes.

After, I would make the trek back to my room, where I fishhed through my dresser to find a pair of pants and a shirt. I rummaged through the dresser and pulled out a Dragonball Z shirt that had Goku and Vegeta on it, along with some plain blue jeans. I threw my clothes on quickly and much to my mother’s dismay I did not iron them. My mother often complained about me not ironing my clothes and going out looking like “I didn’t have any home training.” Still, I never ironed my clothes. I was always on the run, rushing out of my house to get to school which I was already late for and that (As I’ve aforementioned) I didn’t like. So, in my mind I didn’t have time to iron clothes, and I couldn’t really see the difference between how clothes looked ironed opposed to how they looked unironed.

My unfinished homework stayed on the dining room table downstairs when I left it as it usually did. “Bye Mike” I yelled to my mother who was probably asleep again by then as I rushed out of my house. I walked to school and everything was normal still. I hated school. All the homework and being graded got to me. Plus, I was hot headed then, so people telling me what to do wasn’t exactly my favorite thing. Still, somehow I excelled in school. Maybe because I was generally liked by the teachers, or maybe I did more work than I thought I did. Or simply because I had top grades on those stupid state math and reading exams. And what did those tests mean? I whipped past those tests while doing virtually nothing during the school days and actually doing nothing at my house. At school, we used to wrestle in class whenever the opportunity arose. And all I ever did at my house was either play videogames or watch cartoons. But what happened at school is not important! What changed my life happened after I got home from school.

I stood at the bottom of the cracking cement steps to my house with no enthusiasm to enter after a long day at school. I looked up at the old peach colored house that was beginning to become green at certain places due to algae growing on it. I took a deep breath, then quiet looking at the house and walked up the stairs to my front door. “Hey Mom and Dad...” I said as I walked into the house showing off my slight sadness that was caused by just coming home from school. I took my book bag off and left it by the door. At the time, all of the walls in my hallway were white. They had been purposefully blemished to create a look that I personally never understood, but had an aesthetic that slowly grew on me because it was a part of my home. The steps to the second floor were on my right. An old wooden banister and old wooden steps lined the walk up to the bedrooms. Both just beginning to walk of salmon colored dust due to walking around with wet shoes. At the top and bottom of the stairs there were windows that looked out onto the side of my house. On my left, there was our living room. It was a quaint living room. A big Panasonic lumberjack television sat in there rarely used unless of course my sister and I both wanted to use that specific TV at the same time to watch completely different things. We have opposite tastes and often would fight to use that TV because that was the best TV in the house, so when our favorite shows came on at the same time it was war. I was that I often lost. The walls were painted green at the time I believe and our fireplace was on the far wall just about halfway across the room. It was just “upgraded” to a gas fireplace if an upgrade is what you would like to call it. Straight ahead of me were my parents and my kitchen. The kitchen was bright yellow, if I’m not mistaken... really BRIGHT yellow. On a sunny day, you could mistake it for the sun. Besides that, it had an overhead fan for the oven that didn’t work and an outdated counter top that was far too old by then. The windows in the kitchen had white curtains with an orange and yellow design on them. On the right side of the kitchen there was a small room with a large freezer and a door to the side of our house that we never opened because it was locked with a key that we didn’t own.

My parents were in the kitchen, though neither of them were going to cook that day as usual. As some point in time my mother worked afternoons and came home at night; therefore, she could not cook dinner. My father used to cook, but maybe he got tired of it and that started a trend of days on end without a cooked meal in my house. We mostly ate out or ordered in which wasn’t all that bad to me, until I got older and I had to buy my own food and that was horrendous.

“Hey Poopadoopacompanr.” My mother replied to me saying that whole thing as one word as she always would, (Yes that is what she calls me.)

“What’s up Tyr?” My dad said to me.

“Nothing.” I said trying to avoid my parents because well, don’t all kids avoid their parents? I knew the dreaded question that I was never going to be able to answer. “How was school?” One of them asked, maybe both of them.

“How was it good. I’m gonna upstairs now.” I replied;

“Boy you better stay there and talk to me.” My mother said with a grin. “Did you learn anything today?” My mother asked me instantly changing her tone of voice back to a nicer one.

I stopped in my tracks and let my body hang. “I never learn anything in school.” I said with a warm now annoyed that I was being stopped. I stopped the validity of the education system. I was a problem child in school. I threw tantrums all the time and never really paid attention, yet I was never in real trouble and I always had good grades despite never doing homework and being “easily distracted” and a “trouble maker.” So being asked about my day at school was just like poking me with a stick.

“No trouble in school?” She asked.

“Nope, nothing. We had another test; I got another 100.” I said now leaving.

“Do you want to go shopping with me?” My mother asked or something on the lines of that.

“Can we not take a long time please? You always take a long time.” I whined, now leaving.

“No.” I replied trying to go upstairs to my room.

“Boy, just come with me!” She commanded me, now standing by our front door.

“Can we not take a long time please? You always take a long time.” I whined, now making my way down the creaking wooden steps.

“Do you want to take a long time?” My mother asked, now leaving.

“Hey Poopadoopacompanr.” My mother replied to me saying that whole thing as one word as she always would, (Yes that is what she calls me.)
My mother had kicked one of me and I had been sad. It was all I ever was at my uncle’s place. It would have been nice to see him, but he wasn’t there. I was bound within the first fifteen minutes of being at my uncle’s apartment, because all of his kids are many years younger than I am, and he didn’t have a game system for me to play. But I bore through it even though we ended up spending hours there like I knew we would. Like we always do. On the way back home, we drove down fourth street, which is the street that I live on. I was dozing off in the backseat of our uncle’s 2005 Buick Regenon. The beige leather seat kept me warm as the bumpy road of Mt. Vernon made my head dribble off of the door and window as I slided to sleep.

Mt. Vernon is where I grew up, and growing up there wasn’t exactly a fairy tale, but I wouldn’t have rather grown up anywhere else, because Mt. Vernon is where I was raised. It melded into me who I am and I would not trade that for anything. Still I saw Mt. Vernon as a dangerous place growing up, but that was the stigma that it was given. Everyone had nothing but bad things to say about Mt. Vernon, so why would I think differently? A few times we had lockboxes in my elementary school because of a shooting across the street and there had been times when kids get stabbed and jumped in my school. But I was a kid, I didn’t experience with danger, but it was not my last… Later that Illusion of a perfect sanctuary stayed, but after that I would not just completely shatter. But be broken down so much that it digested what she said to the best of my nine year old ability.

I looked at Reggie leaning on the passenger side window talking to his friend. “My head isn’t even that big!” I yelled, before I sat quietly.

“Hi Reggie!” I explained.

“What’s up big head?” He said looking into the back seat for the first time. “How didn’t you see your big head swinging back there?” He said as a follow up with a laugh.

“What’s up big head?”

“I’m head isn’t even that big!” I yelled, before I sat quietly.

Reggie redirected the conversation to our mother “Ma… I need some new shoes.” Reggie said implying that we should go to go get some new shoes.

“What’s wrong with your shoes?” My mother asked Reggie.

“They got destroyed….” Reggie said reaching down to take his shoes off.

Reggie showed us the shoe and it was completely destroyed. The sole was only connected in the middle leaving the front and the back of the shoe hanging off. He moved the shoe around. “See, I can’t wear these Ma.” He added swinging the shoe around to emphasize that they were torn.

As he moved the shoe around the sole ripped on both sides like a baby bird. A baby bird that sadly failed its first flight out of the nest.

“I was interrupted by my mother pulling off at the green light which threw me for a loop. My Mom had broken off of the car and began to speak again. “You can get arrested for that!”

I asked not even really knowing what weed was at the time.

“No, you can. And your ass better not get arrested. Cause I’m not going to help you.” She stated in a serious tone.

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“Yes, you can. And your ass better not get arrested. Cause I’m not going to help you.” She stated in a serious tone.

We pulled up to a place with a big gate. My brother Reggie stood outside of the gate. My mother rolled down the window and yelled. “Harry up before I leave your stupid ass! Reggie opened up, started talking, than walked over to the car. “Hi Ma.” He said through the window as he was opening the car door. My mother drove off and the car sat silently for a second. Our Mother sat quietly, focused on the road ahead. Reggie sat on the passenger side. His attitute was slightly different than usual. He wasn’t wearing his trademark Dufag so you could see his hair. His hair was pulled back into what seemed like a quicky made ponytail. Otherwise he was wearing almost the usual, an oversized Champion pullover hoodie with baggy pants to match.

“Hi Reggie!” I exclaimed.

“What’s up big head?” He said looking into the back seat for the first time. “How didn’t you see your big head swinging back there?” He said as a follow up with a laugh.

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“And how did you do that?” My mother said with a humorous intent, pointing at the shoe with her right hand.

“Playing basketball… That’s all there was to do.” Reggie said with a slight laugh.

“So how was jail?” I asked, instantly changing the mood of the car.

“It was trash. There was nothing to do and the food is garbage.” He stated plainly. “Never go there.” He added in a serious tone. “Or we gonna fight.” He said jokingly as he always would even though he meant it. Ironically if I was doing something wrong or improper Reggie would often step in just to tell me that what I was doing was not the right thing to do. Even though he often did that while punching me (He made no harm.)

“I’m not going to go. I promise.” I said looking down with shame for asking such a stupid question.

No mother would like that. Having to pick her child up from jail. I looked at Reggie leaning on the passenger side window talking to our mother. At this moment, the tensions were lower than they had been in a long time. (Maybe since before he went to jail.) Because Reggie was working on his life and getting his stuff together. They had a convention about something. I didn’t listen because that was “Grown Folks Business.” Often, I would input into conversations between adults and be told stay out of “Grown Folks Business” when I didn’t understand something. I feel like at the time my mother was very proud of my brother for attempting to turn his life around. He dropped out of high school despite being extremely smart. It just wasn’t for him. But he had just gotten his GED with the highest score his GED teacher had ever seen. He had gotten a job at a car wash rather than “being in the streets”. My brother was 20 years old at the time and he was kind of a big Cut in my city.

People who I knew in middle school knew my brother. People who I didn’t know and he didn’t know also knew him because his reputation preceded him. My siblings all get a special kind of love from me, whether I choose to let them know or not. He had the most special love. He was often (what I would call) mean to me, showing love in his own way to make me tougher. Once because I lost a baseball game and didn’t care, he punched me until I cried and explained that losing was a bad thing and I should have more drive to win. At first I just saw it as mean, but I realized that he taught me that losing wasn’t a good thing with those punches. In reality he just didn’t want me to make the same mistakes as him. He finished talking with our mother and moved toward me in the backseat window His frame which was much bigger than mine was blasted from behind with light as he stood in the window. He was probably wearing a Dufag to cover his cornrows and blue and white heads on his neck. He wore a shirt that alluded to weed using cartoon characters that was two sizes too big and huge pants that probably sagged and cuffed down to his all white air force ones.

“What’s up big head.” Reggie said reaching into the car to shake my hand.

I grabbed his hand and shook it vigorously. “What’s up Reggie?” I said excitedly.

“Nothing, I’m chillin’. What you been up to?” He said with his cool demeanor.

“When are you coming down to the house?” I asked wide eyed, too excited to answer his question.

“When I have time and Ma stop playing. But I’m gonna come down more.” He said with a laugh.
posed to be forever. together for a second and it felt like family, like and said “You need to put your feet in some hot water!” We all laughed
invaded my nostrils and grew stronger with time. He looked at Reggie
when he came in. As he mentioned a smell, faintly the smell of feet
turkey on a roll with everything on it. We ate the sandwiches together
or 19 at the time and didn’t have any money. He brought me to 20/20
out of the rear window. A cool spring breeze was blowing through
window as I remembered being in my living room one day with Reggie.

“Reggie…” I pleaded, looking toward my brother.

“Yeah, I’m already ready!” I exclaimed while running to put my

“What do you want? Want me to make some noodles?” He

My cousin was bigger than I was laterally and still talked with a
cowardly dog played on it. The sound played through and Courage
“I’m hungry.” I said now looking toward the TV. Courage the
corner of my street which was called 20/20. They sold rolls for 2$ and

I would play World Of Warcraft for a whole day on the weekends.
It was probably World of Warcraft, but I played too many games to be

My cousin and my sister were both in the room with me as I

I'm hungry. I'm about to get ready for school.” I responded thinking that was

I had asked Reggie to get me food, not knowing he was only 18
or 19 at the time and didn’t have any money. He brought me to 20/20
to get a sandwich. We both ate sandwiches from the small deli on the
corner of my street which was called 20/20. They sold rolls for 2$ and

We left with short goodbyes. It was nice that I would get to see
my brother more, but it wouldn’t be soon, I could feel it. Butterworth
encouraged flowed through me. That was Reggie. Even though he was
supposed to be a “gangster”, he had a soft spot for his little brother.
Always loving, but often he came off mean to me. Yet at that very
moment all I could think of was being able to see my brother more
often. My mother drove the car straight down the road en route to our
house. I looked out of the open window at my brother excitedly
then out of the rear window. A cool spring breeze was blowing through
the window as I remembered being in my living room one day with Reggie.
We were both hungry, which wasn’t very unusual in my house.

“Reggie…” I pleaded, looking toward my brother.

“What's up Big Head?” He replied back to me turning from the
TV to look at me.

“I'm hungry.” I said now looking toward the TV. Courage the
cowardly dog played on it. The sound played through and Courage spoke the gibberish he usually spoke.

My daydream was cut short again because we had arrived at my
house. I walked in and went right upstairs to my room to play the game.
It was probably World of Warcraft, but I played too many games to be
certain. By fifth grade I was hooked on World Of Warcraft. I spent
more time playing that game than doing any one specific thing. Often,
I would play World Of Warcraft for a whole day on the weekends.

When I think about what happened to Reggie, I don’t feel sad, I feel
upset. But I also feel mad, and I feel important. I feel that I’m part of
something bigger that needs to be done.

My dad swallowed hard. Even I, a 10 year old kid, could tell that
something bad was coming, but what was said was something I could
never guess and something that changed me forever.

“I have to tell you guys something.” He said quietly.

“Your brother…” He paused and swallowed again.

“Your brother Reggie died last night.”
I grew up in a very small town in England, which is nestled within one of 9 subdivisions in the East of England in what is called a Shire (or county). My town, which is called Luton, is bigger in size than the (Shire) capital; the Lutoners would debate amongst themselves as to why our town was not the capital since we have an International Airport and they have to travel to Luton or London to fly. Within my town is the street I grew-up on, a U-shaped Close, what is referred to as a cul-de-sac here. There were 13 houses on our close, and we all knew each other. Across the street to make up the U-shape was some housing for the elderly, basically what these are are apartments for the elderly or council flats as they are known in the U.K. These flats are similar in nature to assisted living apartments instead of putting the elderly into nursing homes. They received meals-on-wheels, and the neighborhood children would fetch their groceries for them, and do small chores. Placing the elderly into family oriented communities gives them a feeling of belonging.

As children, we had many places in the country to play. We were nestled in a small valley surrounded by hills (as children, those hills seemed like mountains), Warden Hills; we climbed those hills many times as children with our mother or friends. At the foot of the hills was a swamp. We rescued many salamanders, newts, lizards, tadpoles that turned to frogs, and small snakes. Small creatures that were not in need of rescuing; we spent hours during the long summer school holidays in these areas. Sometimes during the school year our Science teacher would instruct us to collect some tadpoles with the pond water and bring it all to school. We were going to log and watch the different stages of the tadpole’s life as it developed into a frog. This was an experiment of man meeting nature, not all the tadpoles would survive as our teacher explained. Although we tried to provide as natural as possible an environment to their own habitat, some would not survive.

Our parents warned us all the time not to go on the hills alone; so we never went alone, only in groups. In the past, people had gone missing from that area; it had always been associated with the occult and other strange happenings throughout the years.

I loved the small town I grew-up in, everybody knew each other. We helped each other in many ways to maintain the status quo of our community; we did chores for the elderly, cut grass, played for hours with each other. We also knew our neighborhood and the surrounding communities.

My mother introduced my siblings and me to long Saturday afternoon walks to Japanese Rose gardens, walks by canals where would see barges (really long boats -- people actually lived on these boats), the hills and forests. We really appreciated the world we lived in because of what my mother did for us uniting us with nature; but this is all disappearing so fast as man depletes all these natural landscapes to increase human habitats.

VERSELLA MORGAN

We had a large back garden (yard), even though I am from a large family of 6, 5 boys and 1 girl (me). Being the only girl I was left to my own devices a lot of the time because boys don’t want to bother with a girl, so I learned to entertain myself. One of my favorite activities was watching the world go by.

I would lie down flat on my back and watch the clouds moving by. I could see the earth moving from that vantage point, whether real or imagined, the feeling of Euphoria was indescribable. You read about the earth spinning on its axis; but experiencing what you read about is amazing. After some time of watching the clouds move in one direction, and the blue skies behind the clouds move in another direction I would close my eyes with that spinning feeling in my head for it to take me to places unimagined, this was one of the fondest moments in my past. I felt like I really connected with the earth as far as the world is concerned. I could imagine myself anywhere in the universe; usually, I was falling from the sky with beautiful colored jewels falling in the air with me; it was a slow fall, and I would be gathering as much of these precious jewels as I could. You experience a calming peace and a spinning of the head as you open your eyes and readjust to the world around you.

These experiences from the world I know have helped me to appreciate and try to protect our natural habitat. I have passed these values that I was taught onto my own children and they in turn nature walk with their children today.

LUIS ROSALES
LET US GO NOW FRIEND